

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) today voted in favor of H.R. 976, bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), protecting existing health care coverage for 6.6 million children and extending coverage to 3.8 million children who are currently uninsured. The bill will extend coverage to 36,000 additional children in Oregon alone. The annual cost of providing health care to 10 million children is equivalent to 41 days worth of funding for the ongoing war in Iraq.

"Protecting the health of children is a moral obligation," Congressman DeFazio said. "These are the most vulnerable members of our society and it's shameful that so many lack basic health services. H.R. 976 is a good start toward providing health care security to all Americans."

DeFazio continued, "This bill is also good for taxpayers and our economy, because insuring kids means healthier kids, which improves their ability to get an adequate education and become productive members of society while also reducing the burden on taxpayers of paying for emergency room care for the uninsured, the most expensive place to get basic health care."

H.R. 976 enjoys strong bipartisan support. The bill increases funding for CHIP by \$35 billion over five years, which will be used to maintain coverage for 6.6 million children, including 53,000 Oregon children, expand coverage to 3.8 million children who are eligible under existing rules but are not currently enrolled in the program, and improve health care coverage under CHIP. The benefit improvements include dental coverage for all kids enrolled in CHIP and mental health coverage on par with coverage for physical ailments.

President Bush has threatened to veto the bill because he is ideologically opposed to extending health care to children through CHIP and instead believes in using the tax code to provide incentives for all families to shop for health care on their own. He has also complained about the cost of the bill, though, unlike his \$200 billion request for Iraq that Congress will consider soon, and the \$566 billion that has already been provided for the war in Iraq, H.R. 976 will not add a single penny to the federal deficit.